

# MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC # **010-2016**

## LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Philip Levine and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jimmy L. Morales, City Manager

DATE: January 11, 2016

SUBJECT: Celebration of the Fire Department's 95<sup>th</sup> Official Establishment

This letter serves as communication to the Mayor and members of the City Commission that the Miami Beach Fire Department turns 95 years old since its official establishment on January 26, 1921. Chief Fernandez would like to extend an invitation to join the Fire Department in its celebration on Tuesday, January 26, 2016, at the Fire Administration Building, lobby area at 2:30 p.m. where cake and light refreshments will be served.

### Background

Miami Beach has grown from a small village of thirty-three registered voters in 1915 to a modern city of close to 92,000 residents and an average daily population of approximately 250,000 comprised of residents, hotel guests, day-tourists, and local visitors.

Originally incorporated as the town of Ocean Beach in 1915 and the City of Miami Beach in 1917, it was not until 1920 before the first fire engine was purchased and a fire station opened. The Fire Department was officially established by way of ordinance #145 (see attached). The original Miami Beach Fire Station at 617 Collins Avenue was under the direction of J.S. Stephenson, the first fire chief. Fire department legend has it that Chief Stephenson was elevated to the top rank because he was the only person in the department who knew how to operate the new pumper. Chief Stephenson's tenure took him through the "great 1925 land boom" and the devastating 1926 hurricane that hit Miami Beach. On September 19, 1926, the day after the hurricane blew through and flattened Miami Beach, the entire fire department consisted of only 28 men.

The City recovered over the years to the point that fire protection was expanded to three fire stations and four pieces of apparatus. "Old" fire station #3, at 6880 Indian Creek Drive, was completed on August 10, 1937, and construction began on the "present" fire station #2, 2300 Pine Tree Drive, on December 28, 1938.

In 1977, sensing that the fire safety level of hi-rise residents on Collins Avenue needed upgrading, Fire Chief Bishop at that time, was instrumental in persuading the City Commission to build a new fire station at 5303 Collins Avenue in the heart of the district. This became the fourth fire station and meant that response time to emergency calls would be cut to a minimum in that area.

All in all, it has been an impressive era for past and present members of this honorable fire department. In the Miami Beach Fire Department's relatively short history, it has

become one of the top fire departments in the country. The Department is part of an elite group of only 18 fire departments world-wide that is both nationally accredited by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) and Insurance Services Office (ISO) Class 1 rating. This achievement has been accomplished by a continuous dedication and performance by each and every member of the department who on a daily basis strive to maintain the department at its current level of service to its residents and visitors.